

Disclaimer: It's JKR's world not mine. I've said it enough now, that I don't feel I should have to say it all again.

A/N: This is year 6 of the Open Your Eyes universe and if I follow this to my outlines it will be the last novel length story in the series. One shots and the like would be possible in the future, but I hope you all enjoy the ride to the end.

24 June 1996 11 am local time London

British Airways was en route to Rio de Janeiro and two passengers in particular were enjoying the experience of flying first class in complete luxury.

Harry Potter, newly emancipated in both the muggle and wizarding worlds smiled at his equally emancipated companion, "Beats flying on a Firebolt, doesn't it?"

Hermione giggled and wrinkled her nose, "Yes, but just barely."

They were working on their gourmet meal, and both concentrating on the peace of the moment, even if the reality of their lives were nowhere nearly as peaceful. It had come on the suggestion of Albus Dumbledore that the pair get away from the madness of war for a couple of weeks, not to be dealt out of the realities of the conflict, but to refresh themselves to prepare for their important roles. Harry's hair had been growing out for awhile so his scar was covered, and without his signature horn rimmed glasses, he would have no problems with fading into the background in Brazil.

The emancipations had taken place strictly by magical means, and were completed in one afternoon at the nearest ICW diplomatic offices in France. Hermione was mere months from making her new legal identity a reality, and Harry's actions in the Department of Mysteries had sealed his fate and necessity as an adult in the magical world.

As the pair were served their final course Harry took a sip of a large glass of diet coke and exhaled a deep breath, "Just imagine, sun, beaches, and enough historical sites to explore to keep us busy for two weeks."

Hermione grabbed his hand and kissed his index finger, "We'll be the pastiest people on the beaches, but we'll see what we can do about that."

Harry grinned, "Of course seeing you topless is merely a bonus to the entire trip."

Hermione arched her eyebrow, "I did pack bikini tops too, so you had better behave if you want to enjoy the full experience."

Harry placed his unoccupied hand over his heart and intoned, "I solemnly swear to be good."

Hermione giggled again, feeling downright bubbly, which for most of those who knew her would have been a shocking sight indeed. There was something very gratifying and hopeful about taking a trip out into the world, with the man she loved, and no other boundaries between them. She definitely had plans for the trip, and if Harry behaved he was going to be rewarded nicely.

After the meal it was time for the in-flight film, *The Rock*, and while Hermione was merely happy to curl into Harry's lap and enjoy that, Harry watched the film intently and cheered on Sean Connery throughout the film while also wisely taking care to give his attention to the warm and lovely girl in his lap. The flight attendant had merely smiled at the couple and didn't even bother trying to get Hermione back into her own rightful seat.

As Hermione returned to her seat for a brief nap before they arrived in Brazil, Harry opened his own personal notebook and began to attend to the strategies he would use to help win the war. It was charmed to receive messages from Dumbledore, with daily intelligence reports so that Harry could be kept abreast of events in Britain while still enjoying his brief separation from it.

24 June 1996 6 pm local time London

Albus Dumbledore sighed as he patiently sat and waited to make his audience with the Muggle Prime Minister, as was his duty as Chief Wizard of the Wizengamot of a deposed government.

Harry was already in Brazil if the charmed journal was to be trusted, which was an amazing advance in muggle technology to Albus. The

one and only time he had taken an airplane to reach a destination, it had taken much longer to travel a much shorter distance. The young man was exhibiting many promising traits to Albus; all of Harry's best traits were ones that hadn't been in the power base of the magical world in a very long time. Harry was tenacious about succeeding, but his ambition was checked by an honorable moral code.

Ambition with morality would be something new to government following Tom's final defeat, Albus only hoped Harry would succeed where he had failed in the past. Accordingly, Harry was a meticulous planner, but not through manipulating circumstances as Albus could honestly admit he often did. Rather, Harry had an instinctual grasp at understanding the motivations of others, and how they would often react in a given situation. Harry had explained his talent as a form of profiling the inner circle members in the past year and a half, but the words meant nothing to Albus.

Harry would be the Captain of the resistance to Voldemort, while Albus would act to preserve the political, economical, and moral solvency of Magical Britain as an elder statesman of sorts. It would be a somewhat new take on the jobs Albus had held in the past, but only in the goals, not in the methods.

Albus stroked his now trimmed beard contemplatively before an aide cleared his throat, "Mr. Dumbledore. Prime Minister Major is able to see you now."

Albus merely nodded and followed the aide into an adjoining meeting room, where the Prime Minister sat in a chair facing outward to Downing Street. The aide gestured a nearby chair

"Mr. Dumbledore? Please take a seat and explain why Minister Scrimgeour could not be here, any why you've made this meeting of such urgency." Major ordered quietly.

Albus took the offered chair and explained in the tone, which only a long time politician could, "Minister Scrimgeour leads but one branch of our government Mr. Major, and I am certain you've been made aware of this fact in the past. I lead the legislative branch of the government Prime Minister, and because of the current state of the Magical Government in this country, I have been delegated to continue to liaison role between our governments."

Major spun in his chair and faced Dumbledore for the first time, "You've answered one of my questions Mr. Dumbledore."

Dumbledore smiled slightly, "As to your other question Mr. Prime Minister. I am afraid the terrorist organization you've been briefed upon in the past finally made its bid against the government, and due to a variety of factors succeeded in taking the main ministry building. A majority of the power structure was evacuated in time, and the government in exile has been granted full diplomatic status by our version of the United Nations."

Major looked concerned and Dumbledore attempted to assuage those concerns as he raised his hand, "Now, due to our secrecy laws, and the desire of the head of the terrorist organization to consolidate gains before gaining legitimate political power, we suspect the conflict will not spill out into your world for many months, if it ever does. I will be briefing you weekly, and more often depending on the circumstance. I suggest using out present venue, day, and time to coordinate out efforts. Do you have any questions or issues with this?"

Major looked thoughtful for a moment before he slowly nodded, "Is there a manner, with which we can communicate if the need arises?"

Dumbledore merely nodded and reached into his robes, before pulling out a piece of parchment, "This is a phone number which I can be contacted at a moments notice. I am afraid due to the nature of magic our lines of instant communication will have to remain one way, to be initiated from your side. Di you have any other questions, sir?"

Major arched his eyebrow and asked, "Do you fancy mixing business with pleasure?"

Dumbledore's beard twitched and he asked, "Meaning what sir?"

Major grinned wryly, "Typically, I take this time during the summer to tour several golf clubs throughout the country, under the guise of research for our treasury department of course. If you play, we can set aside three to four hours a week."

Dumbledore chuckled, "I am a politician sir, of course I can golf and talk business."

Major tented his fingers and grinned, "Then Mr. Dumbledore, I will see you next week. Please see your way out the way you came in, to keep up appearances."

Dumbledore sighed and nodded, he could move about the muggle world with reasonable ease, but it didn't make the little things any easier.

27 June 1996 10 am Rio de Janeiro Local Time

The first few days in Rio had led to the typical tourist destinations, the Corcovado the small mountain that was location of the giant statue of Jesus Christ overlooking the city below. The view had dwarfed the one they had viewed from Mt. Fuji the previous summer, and the beautiful blue water of the ocean seemed to give the location a certain divinity beyond the obvious. The Copacabana beach had been an interesting experience; it was not overly crowded due to it being technically winter in the Southern Hemisphere. The Pão de Açúcar had once again offered a different perspective of the area.

Today they were preparing to take a portkey to the famed village of Machu Picchu, more for the magical aspects of the village than the tourist benefits.

Hermione was simply buzzing around their hotel room at the Windsor Excelsior hotel overlooking the Copacabana beach. "Can you believe that we get to see the village where a variant of the Fidelius charm was first cast? Even now the magical portions of the village remain unseen by the magical world, despite the invention of GPS and other mapping technology. Think of the scientific applications knowing that magic can in essence, remove an object from the plane of existence, while it can still be seen and walked on. Even the modern incarnation of the Fidelius results in a displacement that is detectable if you know where to look."

Harry merely grinned at Hermione, even though she would probably roll her eyes if he ever told her that she was adorable when wound up over an academic subject like this.

They were both considerably more tanned than they had been a scant few days ago, and while they wouldn't necessarily be confused with locals, they no longer stuck out like the proverbial sore thumb. Going to Peru from Brazil via portkey would take them from warmth and sun, to thin air and much colder conditions in the mountains surrounding Machu Picchu.

The war on the other hand, had been a simple collection of minor skirmishes between lesser Death Eaters and Order members, over secondary targets beyond the obvious ones related to the ministry. Nothing had changed in substance, and neither side has suffered any losses, or injuries.

In short, it was seemingly a good time to escape the madness of the war, and recharge their batteries and learn new things about the world by experiencing them. Hermione had hinted that she had one more portkey journey planned after Machu Picchu but she had remained stubbornly quiet about what it might entail.

Hermione turned her gaze to Harry and noticed two things, first he had a suspicious grin on his face, and second his eyes were unfocused as though he was in deep thought. They would have ample time to deal with deep conversations, today and tonight was about them as a couple, so she dealt with the grin, "What exactly is so amusing?"

Harry's eyes focused and his grin remained, "You are so adorable when you get worked up over learning new things."

Hermione pouted, "Only adorable."

Harry rolled his eyes, "Of course you already knew that I consider you gorgeous all of the time anyways."

Hermione stuck her tongue out before she darted in and pecked Harry on the lips as his arms wrapped around her waist, "How long until our portkey activates?"

Harry smiled and buried his face in her hair before he whispered, "About right now." As Harry finished speaking the pair felt that familiar tug at the navel before disappearing into a flash of light.

27 June 1996 3 pm London Local Time

Severus Snape very much enjoyed his current role within the Order of the Phoenix, he made potions that would have tactical or medical uses, and he didn't adhere to either of the primary factions with the group. One was led by Albus Dumbledore, and the other by, even Snape could admit it, a very impressive rising star known as Harry Potter.

All of this is what made the letter in his hands such a dangerous piece of parchment, his godson Draco was making a plea for help, realizing the depth of evil and depravity the mark on his forearm truly meant.

In his 38 years alive he had went through several phases, and it seemed that each led to his becoming more and more cynical about the inherent good in human beings. It was safer being a cynic, no one could hurt him, and it protected the little piece of him that was still strong enough to bear another attempt well down the road.

Now, it appeared that he couldn't wait much longer two give of that little bit he had saved of himself to save the one person he truly cared for. Lily's green eyes started at him in that accusing way they always did when he battled his conscience, the careless whispers of his youth always seemed to haunt him when he least needed them.

With a few cryptic words of code and the flight of his personal owl, Severus Snape was giving the last remaining bit of humanity he had stored away to his godson, in hopes that it would be returned intact.

27 June 1996 10 PM Rio De Janeiro Local Time

Hermione's tongue stroked Harry's as they kissed languidly in their hotel room bed. Hermione was merely wearing her black sexy lingerie set, for this exact moment, while Harry wore a plain pair of boxers.

Pulling away from the kiss Hermione brushed her nose against Harry's and murmured, "I want you Harry."

Harry closed his eyes and breathed in deeply, seeking to remember this exact second, and all that is signified. Smiling he replied, "I'll always want you love."

Hermione's skin broke into goose bumps as Harry's fingertips gently brushed down her face to her neck, and finally trailed to the front clasp of her bra. Before he could remove the garment, Harry's hand drifted to the sides of her breasts, and with a feather light touch he murmured, "Let me take care of you."

Hermione's brain slowed to a crawl as Harry gently removed her bra and lightly brushed her hardening nipples with the pads of his fingers. Easing Hermione on to her back Harry pulled her into a passionate kiss before he leaned down and captured her erect nipple in his mouth, suckling lightly as his free hand wandered down her abdomen and towards her panties.

Hermione reached out with her right hand and stroked Harry's chest, memorizing the contours of his body before working her way down to the bulge in his boxers.

Harry froze for a second as Hermione slid his boxers down with both hands, and as he leaned back Hermione nuzzled his erection with her nose before she leaned back and looked at him expectantly. Harry swallowed heavily and slid the bit of lace down her thighs and calves, before removing the penultimate barrier between them. As they began the oldest dance known to humanity, they both understood that this was merely the next step in their lives together, and it wouldn't define them more than any other time they shared.

Harry eventually rolled off as the dance concluded, and they were separated with a soft squelching sound before he quietly commented in a drowsy voice, "That was fun."

Hermione smiled in the darkness of their room, "Yes, I imagine we'll have to try it again sometime soon. But, for now let's get some sleep and then we can test out a few theories I have tomorrow morning in the shower."

Harry pulled her into his arms and she burrowed into his chest before he said, "I've always been a fan of water sports." Hermione smiled against his chest but her eyes drifted closed in post coital bliss, tomorrow would be another day.

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It seemed that in times of war, one of two things happened to people, either they lived hard, or they didn't live at all Sirius mused as he walked down the street with Evangeline, he had popped the question the prior night and now they were planning a wedding to happen before the end of summer.

He had no illusions about the fact that Harry and Hermione would be following the same route since they had both been emancipated. He pondered for a moment on bringing Hermione's parents back for a surprise, but he knew he couldn't it was too dangerous for them now.

So many things they lost by fighting in this damned war, and what would be the pay off in the end, more dead friends while evil could be allowed to slide back into the shadows? No, Harry had it right, it was time to start removing the poisonous elements in their society, and not for time in prison, but for time to allow evil to burn in hell like they rightfully deserved.

Evangeline leaned into him and asked, "Something on your mind Siri?"

Sirius tightened his arm around her and shook his head, "No, just remembering that all of this is a distraction. It's an amazing and wonderful distraction, but we aren't muggles that can go back to their homes and remain blissfully ignorant."

Evangeline frowned and closed her eyes, the war always intruded on their moments of happiness it seemed, and there was really no way of getting around the painful truth. Instead she contented herself with the embrace of her fiancé as they continued down the street in muggle London, just enjoying the sites as the world passed them by.

5 July 1996 9 AM Kingston Local Time

Harry glanced around at the strange confluence of people in the waiting room, there were chickens, men with shrunken heads, and even what appeared to be a troll wearing a leisure suit.

With an arched eyebrow he turned to Hermione, "I know you're going to explain to me why we're the next in line to see whoever caters to this sort of clientele?"

Hermione giggled, "This entire room reminds me of an American movie I watched a few years ago." Shaking her head she turned to Harry, "This is a good trip, trust me Harry. After we're done here we'll go to the ICW offices in town and pick up our OWL results, grab lunch at a nice restaurant, and then we'll head back to Rio and prepare for our flight back to London."

A voice over the loudspeaker came across in a tinny tone, "Number 7." A strange looking woman with dreadlocks and yellowing teeth walked over to them, "If you'll follow me please, Madam Calypso will be able to see you in a moment."

Harry turned to Hermione as they both stood, "Madam Calypso?"

Hermione explained as they followed the woman out of the waiting room, "Jamaican native magic is commonly referred to as voodoo, or black magic because of how closely it ties into the concept of death. While looking through some books I found they were capable of removing and destroying soul fragments from witches and wizards, with a rather easy ritual. But, it requires a licensed practitioner to do so."

Harry sighed, "Madam Calypso?"

Hermione grinned as she canted her head, "You tell me how you feel after we're all done, and then I'll explain all of the other details."

The woman led them into a normal looking examination room, and Harry couldn't but help chuckling over how bizarre something so normal seemed when compared to the rest of the building.

After another minute or two of waiting Madam Calypso entered the room, she had the same dreadlocks as her assistant, but seemed rather normal aside from that.

Looking down at her clipboard she said, "Mr. Potter, here for a horcrux extraction from a scar on your head then?"

Harry was almost speechless but managed a quiet, "Yes Ma'am."

Madam Calypso smiled, "Very well, this should only take a couple of minutes as I prepare the ritual room. But, first let me examine the scar to ensure that we won't have any complications."

Madam Calypso pulled out an elongated wand, with a strange stone on the tip and she murmured a strange language and commented, "It appears that this isn't the only soul piece from whoever gave this one to you. I'd assume this is a result of Voldemort's attack on you as an infant?"

Harry swallowed thickly, "You won't tell anyone about this, will you?"

Madam Calypso smiled kindly, "Part of my oath as a healer pertains to patient confidentiality, if I breached the oath I would lose all of my magic, and most likely my life, so I assure you Mr. Potter your secret is quite safe with me. My assistant is a non-magical woman so she would doubtfully have any clue who you are, and the waiting room has obscuring charms in place to protect the identities of my clients. You are surely not the first celebrity to pass through my office, but you might be the cutest."

Harry blushed as she put her wand back, "I'll be back in a few minutes and then we can go to the ritual room, and get rid of that ghastly thing, sending it along to where it belongs."

As she left Harry turned to Hermione, "I wonder how this will affect my magic."

Hermione shrugged, "There have been a few recorded instances of this happening in the past, but never to a pair of wizards as powerful as you and Riddle. In one instance a wizard's animagus form changed, and his patronus changed forms also."

Harry nodded thoughtfully, "Well, when we get back to London I'll have to check it out. It might not be safe unless we have some supervision."

Madam Calypso opened the door to the examination room, "If you'll follow me, we should have this all finished and done with in about twenty minutes barring any unforeseen complications."

Harry turned to look at Hermione, who smiled encouragingly before she took his hand and they exited the room, if all went well the war was about to take another drastic turn.

5 July 1996 11 AM Kingston Local Time

Hermione sat in her chair at the small restaurant glancing down at the innocuous looking white envelope that held within it the fruit of five long years of hard work and studying. She turned to Harry with a helpless look on her face, and she was once again struck by how much...lighter Harry's expression had looked since the soul piece had been removed and banished to hell.

With a grin Harry commented, "You do realize waiting isn't going to change the scores at all, and I did promise I would open mine when you did, so..."

Hermione huffed before she twirled the envelope around in her hands and began to open it at the crease; slowly she opened the envelope and removed the results. Harry was watching in amusement the entire time as he had already opened his envelope and was waiting to see his results.

Hermione Jane Granger O.W.L Examination Results

Scoring Scale

Outstanding 90-100 Percentile

Exceeds Expectations 74-89 Percentile

Acceptable 60-73 Percentile

Poor 45-59 Percentile

Dreadful 30-44 Percentile

Troll 0-29 Percentile

Course

Theoretical

Practical

Final Score

Ancient Runes

99

99

Arithmancy

98

98

Astronomy

93

92

93

Care of Magical Creatures

98

91

95

Charms

100

94

97

Defense Against the Dark Arts

99

93

96

## Herbology

96

97

97

## History of Magic

96

96

## Muggle Studies

95

95

## Potions

98

98

98

## Transfiguration

100

96

98

Final Results: 11/11 OWLS 11- Outstanding

Class Ranking: 2/102

Percentile Ranking: 1% Worldwide

Harry James Potter O.W.L Examination Results

Scoring Scale

Outstanding 90-100 Percentile

Exceeds Expectations 74-89 Percentile

Acceptable 60-73 Percentile

Poor 45-59 Percentile

Dreadful 30-44 Percentile

Troll 0-29 Percentile

Course

Theoretical

Practical

Final Score

Ancient Runes

90

90

Arithmancy

87

87

Astronomy

90

90

90

## Care of Magical Creatures

92

96

94

## Charms

95

97

96

## Defense Against the Dark Arts

97

100

98

## Divination

N/A

N/A

N/A

## History of Magic

86

86

Herbology

91

90

91

Muggle Studies

95

95

Potions

94

94

94

Transfiguration

94

98

96

Final Results: 11/11 OWLS 10 - Outstanding 1 – Exceeds Expectations

Class Ranking: 6/102

Percentile Ranking: 2% Worldwide

Harry looked down at his scores in satisfaction as Hermione went over hers with a fine toothed comb, she was happy with her results, but wanted to see what her relative strengths and weaknesses were.

Hermione finally glanced up from her scores and held her scores out as Harry traded with her, so that they could see how the other had done.

Harry grinned at Hermione's scores and passed them back, "I'd say I'm surprised but, that would be a lie."

Hermione replied, "Well, I'd hope five years of hard work would get me somewhere. Not that you did all that poorly with two years of really applying yourself, mister 10 OWLS."

Harry merely nodded and took Hermione's hand, "So, are you ready to go back into the mess?"

Hermione sighed and pushed her few remaining leaves of lettuce around her plate, "If I didn't know that Riddle would try to push beyond Britain's borders, I'd suggest we leave him to his own form of destruction and death and grab all of our friends and family while I was at it. But, that wouldn't solve anything, and...."

Harry finished for her, "Evil only really succeeds when good people do nothing." He swirled his glass for a moment looking down at the table, "You know that as wonderful as this break has been, it isn't real."

Hermione sighed again and nodded forlornly, "Yes."

Harry turned his eyes towards her again and softly said, "But, you and me here together, this is the real part. I promise you, that this is one thing that isn't going to change."

Hermione smiled sadly but nodded, "I'm going to marry you one of these day Mr. Potter."

Harry grinned, "Just tell me the time and place."

Hermione rolled her eyes but her smile turned happier, as Harry motioned to the server for the check. Britain was waiting, and no matter how much they wished otherwise, it wouldn't wait forever.

7 July 1996 8 AM London Local Time

Harry and Hermione exited the main terminal in Heathrow Airport, their belongings all shrunk down and placed in their pockets. The pair looked like a tanned well rested young couple, perhaps back from a honeymoon or some similar trip. To those that knew them, it would be clear that there was something tangibly different about Harry in particular, but it wasn't something easily defined.

As they walked out into the muggy London morning, Remus and Tonks appeared as though from thin air and Remus asked, "Have a good trip, then?"

Harry nodded with a grin on his face, "It sure beats sitting around headquarters reading books, that much is certain."

Tonks looked at Harry's face carefully before she exclaimed, "Blimey, your scar's almost completely gone."

Harry rolled his eyes at Tonks, "Nice, I don't think Riddle heard you though. Why don't you speak up a bit more?"

Hermione added, "We can discuss this elsewhere, perhaps where discretion won't be as important Tonks. How are we getting back to Grimmauld, apparition, portkey?"

Remus merely grinned before he raised his hand and whistled, "No, we're taking a taxi. Magical travel is forbidden, until we can ascertain what steps Riddle has taken to track or prevent them."

As the taxi pulled up to the curb, Harry and Hermione shared a look, they had only been gone for two weeks, and while Harry had regular information reports, it was the little things like this that would take the most time to acclimate to.

7 July 1996 11 AM London Local Time

"So, basically Voldemort has solely worked on consolidating his power, while also sending his more affluent death eaters abroad, to gather more support." Harry summarized as they sat in the parlor room listening to Dumbledore give a detailed report.

Dumbledore sighed, "While the more extreme groups will no doubt savor the chance to kill indiscriminately, I believe we've done enough politically in the last few months to guarantee Tom will not

gain the kind of mainstream support Gellert had for nearly twenty years."

Harry glanced over to Hermione before he mentioned, "I underwent an operation of sorts while we were on vacation. The horcrux in my scar was removed and destroyed, meaning that Riddle is down to five soul pieces at a maximum."

Dumbledore nodded, "I have garnered more leads in this endeavor during your absence, but I will take Severus along when I make any expeditions." Rubbing his beard he added, "I confess I was not aware such a procedure existed, but I do not disapprove now that it is done."

In a curious tone of voice he asked, "Have you ascertained the effect the horcrux removal had had on your magical abilities?"

Harry shrugged, "Occlumency has been much easier, and the few spells I've tried have been wandless. I had intended on testing further, when I got a chance later today."

Dumbledore merely nodded his agreement as Hermione jumped in at this point, "Professor, what are we going to do about our education, now that Hogwarts is closed?"

Dumbledore smiled, "In the past two weeks, all but twenty students have made arrangements to temporarily transfer to other magical schools during the balance of the conflict. I understand that both you and Mr. Potter represented Hogwarts admirably." Glancing down at a pocket watch he continued, "I believe Mr. and Ms. Weasley have several things to catch you up on, and I have a meeting I must prepare for. Harry, Hermione we will talk more about your continuing education tomorrow."

7 July 1996 1 PM London Local Time

Ron Weasley loved meal times, and today was even more brilliant because Harry and Hermione had returned from their vacation and he would have someone different to mope around the house with than Ginny.

"So they've suspended the Quidditch season, until you-know-who is dealt with. The first time in 300 years that a season has been suspended." Ron nattered on waiting for the food to reach the table.

Harry listened with a smile on his face as Ron continued on, "Mum has been forcing us to do chores around Grimmauld without magic. But, we've managed to get some practice in with old Mad Eye."

The food filled the table as Dobby and Winky entered the room, and while it wasn't a Hogwarts feast, the little elves were celebrating the return of their Master and Mistress just like the others in the house.

Sirius took a sip of his chilled butterbeer, "Tell Ron, about your OWL results you two."

Harry nodded to Hermione and she squeezed his hand under the table, "Harry and I both managed to receive 11 OWLs for our results. Since neither of us took the divination exam, it was the best we could manage."

"Blood hell, you both got 11 OWLs. Bill got more but he was in a lower percentile and Percy...well he's just a git." Ron commented between bites of food.

Hermione wrinkled her nose at Ron's eating habits but replied, "Yes, we were both quite happy with our results."

Ron swallowed a large mouthful, "I managed 8 OWLs and mum seemed pretty happy about it. Happy as she gets any more, anyways."

Harry nodded, "Well, we all have to grab any happiness we can for now. I was thinking about maybe making a trip into London with Hermione in a few days, if you want to invite anyone we can do a double date."

Ron's ear reddened but he nodded, "Yeah."

Ginny was watching the group with interest, she was only a year behind the rest in school, but with Hogwarts closed her mum had already filled out the transfer request to Beauxbatons. Molly was doing everything she could it seemed to keep at least one of her children as separate from the war as possible. Ginny felt as if she

was growing apart from the other three at the table, and she didn't know how to feel about it.

Hermione took that moment to turn to Ginny, "Tonks told me that you're transferring to Beauxbatons for next term, are you excited?"

Ginny shrugged, "Most of my friends are doing the same, so it shouldn't be too different." Hermione nodded, and while the conversation had been brief, it somehow had a feeling of finality to it. Ginny knew then, that her path wouldn't follow the other three at the table, and while part of her was sad, another part of her felt more free than it had since before the diary made its way into her life.

As the meal wound down Harry shared a look with Hermione, it was time to see the impact of the horcrux removal once and for all.

7 July 1996 8 PM London Local Time

Harry took a deep breath and looked over to Sirius, Remus, and Hermione, "Are you all ready to step in if something goes wrong during the transformation?"

Sirius merely waved his concern aside, "Harry, we learned the transformation with Pettigrew, trust me when I say we are prepared for anything."

Harry sighed and nodded as he focused on the transformation, while not as fast as his usual change he transformed into his familiar jaguar form and rolled his neck in a human like gesture. As he stalked over to a shadowed corner, the others held their breath as he sunk into the shadow disappearing, before he reappeared a moment later no worse for the wear.

With much less reluctance he transformed back and grinned in relief, "No real changes there, what else should I try?"

Hermione suggested, "Try your patronus."

Harry nodded and pointed his wand, silently casting the spell still came easily enough, but instead of the familiar sight of his stag patronus, a feline form bounded out of his wand, a form that looked suspiciously like his animagus form, and it looked even more solid than his powerful stag had been.

The other's looked on wide eyed as Harry ended the spell and turned to Hermione, "Well, I certainly didn't expect that."

Hermione smiled sadly, "Now my doe won't have any company."

Harry looked at her calculatingly for a moment before he said, "You cast the spell, and we'll see what happens."

Hermione frowned but complied, "Expecto Patronum." She blinked in surprise much as Harry had when her own feline prowled out of the end of her wand, taking a lap around the room before she cancelled the spell.

Remus looked less surprised when he suggested, "Couples tend to have related patroni if they have a sufficient emotional connection."

Harry nodded, having mixed emotions about the change, in essence it was like he no longer needed to hold on to that picture of his father protecting him, and instead had replaced it was his own image. He knew that on an intellectual level, but it was still strange seeing a visual clue of it.

Sirius continued the experiments, "See if you can still speak Parseltongue."

Harry shared a look with a blushing Hermione, "Trust me, that still works, but that's a story for a different time and place I think."

Sirius' face took on a pink hue a moment later before he said, "Well...I imagine you should just keep experimenting, to see if you notice any differences."

Harry shook his head, "I can tell you right now, that I haven't gotten any more powerful. But, it does feel as though I'm able to focus a bit more when using magic. My Occlumency is easier now, and I can do a bit more wandless magic than I was able to before. Rather like having your ears become unplugged after a long time, that you hadn't even realized they were plugged in the first place."

Remus clapped his hands together and moved towards the door, "Well then, I say we should leave these two to some of their, erm experiments with Parseltongue."

Sirius barked out a brief laugh as he waggled his eyebrows, "Well said, Moony."

As the door closed Harry and Hermione shared a brief look before they both shrugged, Harry gestured with his hand and locked the door. Hermione wrapped her arms around his waist and she grinned before pulling his head down into a kiss, sometimes the best experiments were done when no one else was watching.

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Harry glanced around the booth at the collection of his friends, the motley crew of teenagers that looked for all of the world like normal people of their ages. Ron was stealing chips from Luna's plate of fish and chips while Hermione held his hand under the table, she looked so serene and happy it was almost breathtaking for him to experience, even after the events in Brazil. Luna and Ron had become official within the last week, and as horrid as it sounded Harry and Hermione were glad to be somewhat rid of his sullen behavior from earlier in the summer.

The rest of the group was filled out by others from the defense study group and mostly couples from that collection as Neville was sidled up with Hannah Abbot of all people, apparently the pair had opened up some sort of a relationship near the end of the year and the group had welcomed the Hufflepuff girl right into this small circle of friends. Ginny on the other hand had tagged along with no real date, and she looked rather bored without someone else to keep her company on that level.

Ron turned to Harry still chewing on the pilfered chip and complained, "I still don't understand how the aliens lost to the muggles in the movie. They had all of the strategic advantages until the crazy guy thought of how to beat their shields."

Harry merely replied, "Survival is the ultimate incentive Ron."

Ron looked doubtful but shrugged and dropped the discussion, his complaints were mostly for show anyways, he spent half of the movie engrossed in the explosions, and the other half exploring Luna's tonsils.

It was a strange dichotomy Harry thought as the group joked and teased each other the rest of the night before returning to their homes in the magical world. In some aspects they were still just normal teenagers, trying to experience the world and find their way through even the most simple of decisions. On the other hand they were all living in a world besieged by a war that had already taken several friends and family members away, Harry alone had taken more lives than most veteran police officers or even soldiers and it was only going to get worse. The real important choices had already been made for many of them, and it was only in the back drop of this 'normal' existence that the stark contrast could truly be seen.

The Blood war had officially started and for now, that was the only certainty any of them had.

A/N: There it is folks, the first chapter of the finale in the trilogy. I have no real guarantees as to my updating schedule, but I will strive to finish this one up by Christmas time at the latest.

I'd like to see some of the lurkers drop some reviews over the course of this story because for all intents and purposes this will likely be the last full length Harry Potter fic I'll ever write, and I'd like the input as I go along. Thanks for reading and leave a review on the way out if you please.

Question of the Chapter:

Having seen the trailers for HBP it appears obvious that filmmakers have taken some liberties with characterizations to make the film fit where the characters are heading in DH. Do you think this is a good or bad thing?